The Accessibility Unit for Students with Disabilities of the University of Athens:

Mission, Services and the 3-year experience from the Psychological Counseling Service

A. Sofianopoulou
A. Pino
G. Kouroupetroglou
A. Kalantzi-Azizi
University of Athens

- Undergraduate Students: 98,675
- Professors: 2,128
- Employees: 2,536
- Faculties: 6
- Departments: 34
Students with Disabilities

- Recorded by the Accessibility Unit (2007-09): 251
- Recorded by Faculty Secretariats (2006-09): 372
- Merged: 432
- Estimated: >1000

- Low Vision or Blind: 60
- Deaf: 49
- Speech (+deaf): 84
- Motor impaired: 152
- Other (+diseases): 267
- Estimated + 150%
Mission

- The mission of the **Accessibility Unit for Students with Disabilities** is:

  to actively realize coequal access to academic studies for students with different abilities and needs, through:

  environmental modifications, Assistive Technologies and access services.
Organization

Vice-Rector of Students’ Provision

Council for Students with Disabilities

Accessibility Unit for Students with Disabilities

Dpt. of e-Access
Dpt. of Structured Environment Accessibility
Dpt. of Transportation
Dpt. of Psychological Counseling

Faculty Secretariats’ Responsible
Council for Students with Disabilities

- Vice Rector
- Professor of Special Education
- Professor of Psychology
- Professor of Accessible Computing
- Representative of the Campus Technical Service (Civil Engineer)
- The head of the Students’ Club
- Visually Impaired Student*
- Mobility Impaired Student*
- Hearing Impaired Student *

* Appointed from the National Association of the Disabled
Permanent Personnel

- 1 Electrical Engineer – MSc IT
- 1 Civil Engineer
- 1 Mechanical Engineer
- 1 Psychologist
- 1 Digital Document Technician
- 1 Sign Language Interpreter
- 1 Employee for Volunteer service support
- 1 Secretary
- 3 Drivers
Main website of the Accessibility Unit
http://access.uoa.gr
Departments

The Accessibility Unit includes the following departments and activities:

A. Electronic Accessibility (e-access)
B. Structured Environment Accessibility
C. Transportation Service
D. Psychological Counseling Service
E. Volunteers Service (pilot phase)
A. Electronic Accessibility

- Evaluation of Students’ abilities.
- Provision of Personal Assistive Technologies.
- Technical support of accessible workstations in University libraries.
- Dissemination of accessibility know-how (website, seminars, etc.).
- Organization of volunteer work for helping the disabled students.
- Operation of a Video Relay Service for deaf students.
- Production and distribution of accessible educational material.
UoA VRS
Communication possibilities

- Mobile Phone
  - Video call (3G)
  - SMS
- Fax
- Computer
  - e-mail
  - chat
  - Video call (IP)
    - ooVoo (www.oovoo.com)
    - Windows Live Messenger (download.live.com)
Recording the Needs of the disabled students
Brochures
Open Source Free AT Software

http://access.uoa.gr/fs
Commercial Assistive Technology

http://e-ility.gr
Accessible Libraries

http://speech.di.uoa.gr/libaccess
B. Structured Environment Accessibility

- Validation of accessibility specifications for new University buildings and the external environment of the campus.
- Modification of existing buildings and the external environment of the campus to become accessible.
- Deals with every-day accessibility problems

**Overview**

University of Athens - Accessibility Unit
C. Transportation Service

- Arranges everyday transportation to the University of students who use a wheelchair, or those with severe mobility impairments.
E. Volunteers service for Students with disabilities (pilot phase)

Volunteers (student and community) are coordinated by our Unit to aid/facilitate disabled students in various domains:

- Mobility
- Communication
- Accessible educational material
- Note taking
- Tutoring in courses
- Tutoring in Computer use
- Studying
D. Psychological Counseling Service

- Provides individual and group psychological counseling to students with disabilities.
The Laboratory of Psychological Counselling for Students, UoA

UNIVERSITY OF ATHENS

School of Philosophy

Faculty of Philosophy, Pedagogy, Psychology

Department of Psychology

Undergraduate Diploma in Psychology (4 years)

Postgraduate Master Programme in Clinical Psychology (3 years)

School Psychology (2 years)

Counselling and Career Guidance (2 years)

Postgraduate Master Programmes in collaboration with the Department of Pedagogy

I. Laboratory of Experimental Psychology

II. Laboratory of Psychometrics

III. Laboratory of Psychological Counselling for Students (LPSC)

Individual Psychological Counselling

Community prevention

Supervision for trainees in Clinical Psychology

Research
- Diploma in psychology
- Master (Clinical & School Psychology)
- PhD

Cooperation with other counselling
- CBT centres in Greece for education & research
- Cooperation with Counselling Centres abroad & FEDORA Psyche

Website (psycho-social information)

Publications

Students with special needs

International Students

Cooperation with IBRT

Individual Psychological Counselling

Community prevention

Supervision for trainees in Clinical Psychology

Research
- Diploma in psychology
- Master (Clinical & School Psychology)
- PhD

Cooperation with other counselling
- CBT centres in Greece for education & research
- Cooperation with Counselling Centres abroad & FEDORA Psyche

Website (psycho-social information)

Publications

Students with special needs

International Students

Cooperation with IBRT
Past experiences

- The Counseling Center for Students of the University of Athens has a long experience since 1992:
  - psychological counseling for students with disabilities,
  - other activities concerning inclusion of students with disabilities to the academic community.

- Actions:
  - Horizon No 91003E1
    - Program of training “tutors” and “peer counselors” for deaf students
    - Academic inclusion of Students with Disabilities
    - “Higher Education Area and Disabled Students: towards a European politic of inclusion”
Since September 2008

Services **offered at the Students’ Counseling Center**

**Activities:**
- Individual counseling/ psychotherapy (cbt-oriented)
  - Web-counseling
- Group intervention programs (cbt-oriented)
- Volunteers Program (pilot): support for the semester exams
- Actions for information/ sensibilization of the university community (together with the other Services)

**Addressed to:**
- All Students with Disabilities of the UoA (undergraduate/postgraduate)
- Services offered up to 6 months after graduation
Psychological Counseling for SwD

- Similarities with non-disabled students
  - Intelligence
  - Interests - skills – plans for the future
  - Learning needs (studies)
  - “emerging adulthood”

- Differences with non-disabled students
  - Physical disabilities
  - (Chronic) diseases
  - Functional difficulties
A disability is not a factor leading to adjustment difficulties

Possible adjustment difficulties due to:
- Frustration
- Continuous stress

Other factors:
- Lack of infrastructure needed for academic learning
- Attitudes towards SwD
  - Pity
  - Rejection
Usual difficulties

- Academic difficulties/ study skills/ exam stress/ procrastination
- Interpersonal relationships (difficulties with parents, friends or partner)
- Low self-esteem
- Anxiety/ Phobias
- Mood difficulties
- Eating difficulties
- Other problems that hinder students’ everyday adjustment and functionality
Interventions

- **Individual Counseling**
  - 50-60 min./Week
  - 4 – 25 sessions
  - Depending on the difficulties and students’ motivation
  - Confidentiality
  - Sign-language interpreter of needed
  - Referral if needed

- **Group Counseling**
  - 2 h./Week
  - 8 – 10 sessions
  - 8 – 10 participants
  - 2 therapists
  - Mixed-up groups
  - Groups with specific structure and specific topics (eg. stress management, assertiveness training, anger management, self-awareness etc.)
  - Confidentiality
  - Sign-language interpreter of needed
Other activities

- Communication with Professors or University's staff, concerning management of difficult situations.
- Preparing guides for Academic Staff and University Employees
- Editing of Guidelines for semester exams addressed to Academic Staff
- Communication with parents to motivate students to be addressed to the Service
- Volunteers Service – Training program of Volunteers, support if needed
- Organization of information events
- Research activities (ADHD, learning difficulties, quality of life and psychological difficulties)
- Participation to International Camp on Communication and Computers for blind or partially sighted youth (ICC)
- Exchange of experiences with colleagues abroad
- Cooperation with similar Units/ Services in Greece and abroad
- Presentations to congresses
Future Plans

- Group interventions for parents of SwD
- Group intervention for communication skills and raise of self-esteem.
- Research on topics:
  - quality of life
  - emerging adulthood
  - psychological difficulties
- Counseling volunteers
Experiences of the Counseling Service

- Access to SwD
  (website, announcements, information material to Secretariats)
- Requests
  (courses and exams/ difficulties with academic Staff/ employees)
- Therapeutic relationship
- The role and the involvement of parents
- Parents’ counseling to motivate SwD
- Individual Counseling Sessions: increase of requests
- Group interventions: low participation interest
- Other Issues:
  - motivation of students
  - management of manipulative behaviors
  - role of psychologist and boundaries needed
  - supervision
  - collaboration with other mental health specialists
Contact

Accessibility Unit for Students with Disabilities
National and Kapodistrian University of Athens
University Campus, Ilissia
Department of Informatics and Telecommunications building
GR-157 84 Athens, Greece
Tel.: (+30) 210 7275345
Fax: (+30) 210 7275183
URL: http://access.uoa.gr
E-mail: access@uoa.gr